

PATENT APPLICATION

of

Michael T. Walsh

for

SLIP-RESISTANT AQUATIC COMPONENT AND METHOD FOR MAKING THE SAME

Attorney Docket 6415-68384

**SLIP-RESISTANT AQUATIC COMPONENT
AND METHOD FOR MAKING THE SAME**

5

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to an aquatic component, and more particularly to a slip-resistant aquatic component and method for making the same.

Background of the Disclosure

10 Aquatic components associated with, for example, swimming pools, spas, hot tubs, or showers are constructed from a variety of materials. For example, it is common for aquatic components to be constructed of plastic, metal, concrete, tile, or other materials.

15 It is desirable for an aquatic component to possess relatively high slip-resistant properties. However, some of the materials used in the construction of aquatic components do not possess high slip-resistant properties when provided in a particular surface finish. For example, plastic or metal that is finished with a smooth surface is slippery when wet.

As a result, a number of techniques have heretofore been utilized in an effort to increase the slip-resistant properties of aquatic components. For example, concrete components may be formed with a rough surface texture to enhance its slip-resistant properties. Adhesive strips constructed with a non-slip material have been secured to some aquatic components. Plastic aquatic components have been molded with a textured pattern in an effort to enhance slip-resistance. In regard to metallic aquatic components, a number of surface altering techniques have heretofore been utilized in an effort to enhance the slip-resistant properties thereof. For example, abrading techniques such as grinding or sand blasting have been used.

Summary of the Disclosure

According to illustrative embodiments of the present invention, an aquatic component and a method for forming the same are provided. The aquatic component includes a slip-resistant texture having a plurality of protrusions formed in a first surface
5 thereof. The method includes the step of contacting a surface of the aquatic component to form protrusions in the opposite surface so as to create the slip-resistant texture.

One illustrative embodiment of the present invention provides a method of forming a slip-resistant texture on an aquatic component. The aquatic component has a first surface and a second, opposite surface. The method includes the steps of
10 positioning the aquatic component in a work machine and contacting the second surface with a work tool to form protrusions in the first surface.

Another illustrative embodiment of the present invention provides a slip-resistant article including an aquatic component having first and second opposite surfaces. The aquatic component is prepared by a process including the steps of
15 positioning the aquatic component in a work machine and contacting the second surface with a work tool to form protrusions in the first surface.

In yet another illustrative embodiment of the present invention, an aquatic component is provided which includes a metal body having first and second opposite surfaces. The first surface has a plurality of protrusions that form a slip-resistant texture.
20 The second surface has a plurality of indentations defined therein, each of which corresponds with one of the plurality of protrusions.

Exemplary implementations of these concepts include drain covers, gutters, and pool steps along with the associated methods for making the same. Such implementations are suitable for use in environments such as pools, saunas, hot tubs,
25 spas, bathing facilities, and the like.

Additional features of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following detailed description of illustrative

embodiments exemplifying the best mode of carrying out the invention as presently perceived.

Brief Description of the Drawings

5 The detailed description particularly refers to the accompanying figures in which:

FIG. 1 is a fragmentary perspective view of a pool gutter having a slip
resistant surface defined therein;

10 FIG. 2 is a fragmentary perspective view of a pool step having a slip
resistant surface defined therein;

FIG. 3 is a plan view of a drain cover having a slip resistant surface
defined therein; and

15 FIG. 4 is a diagrammatic fragmentary sectional view taken along line 4-4
of FIGS. 1 - 3, showing a portion of an aquatic component positioned in a work machine
for forming the protrusions.

Detailed Description of Illustrative Embodiments

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof have been shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that there is no intent to limit the invention to the particular forms disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

25 Referring now to FIGS. 1-3, there is shown a number of aquatic components 12 having a slip-resistant texture 10 defined therein. What is meant herein by the term "aquatic component" is any component, structure, or device that is utilized in the construction or equipping of areas, rooms, structures, assemblies, or mechanisms

which are exposed to water or other liquids. For example, aquatic components may include components utilized in the construction of swimming pools or the area surrounding such pools. Aquatic components may also include the components utilized in the construction of a spa, hot tub, or shower room. Specific examples of aquatic
5 components include pool gutters, pool steps, drain covers, skimmer covers, hand rails, and the like. Other specific examples of aquatic components include structures utilized in the construction of an aqueous environment in the form of horizontal surface structures such as pool edges or surrounds, along with floors for use in or around pools, hot tubs, or the like. In addition to such horizontal surfaces, aquatic components may also take the
10 form of substantially vertical structures such as end walls for competitive swimming turns. Aquatic components may also take the form of seating surfaces such as life guard seats, swimming instructor seats, or the like, or stairs, or other inclined surfaces such as accessory ramps or inclines associated with therapeutic pools, tubs, or the like. Aquatic components may also be provided as pool structures utilized as markings such as pool
15 signs, racing stripes, or the like. It should be appreciated that above-described examples of aquatic components are exemplary in nature, and that numerous other components, structures, or devices for use in aquatic environments such as pools, spas, hot tubs, or shower rooms may also be constructed with the teachings described herein.

As shown in FIGS. 1-3, each of the aquatic components 12 includes a
20 component body 18 having first or outer surface 20 and an opposite second, or inner surface 22. The outer surface 20 is generally the surface of the aquatic component 12 that is contacted by user. For example, in the case of a drain cover or step, the outer surface 20 is the surface of the component 12 on which the user steps (i.e., walks). As such, the outer surface 20 has the slip-resistant texture 10 defined therein.

25 The aquatic components 12 may be constructed from any type of material which may be permanently deformed under pressure as a result of being punched or otherwise formed as described below. In a specific exemplary embodiment, the aquatic

components 12 are constructed from metal. In a specific implementation of this exemplary embodiment, the aquatic components 12 are constructed from stainless steel such as 12-gauge stainless steel (.105" thick). Stainless steel has a number of favorable characteristics such as corrosion resistance which render it desirable for use in aquatic environments. Moreover, certain plastics also may be utilized in the construction of the aquatic components 12 described herein.

As will be described below in greater detail, the slip-resistant texture 10 utilized in the construction of the aquatic components 12 is provided by the use of a number protrusions 24 which extend outwardly from the flat portions of the outer surface 10 of the aquatic component 12. The protrusions 24 may be formed in the body 18 of the component 12 by the use of any one of a number of manufacturing techniques. One manufacturing technique which is particularly useful for forming the protrusions 24 in metallic aquatic components 12 is punching.

As shown in greater detail in FIG. 4, an upwardly extending side portion 15 28 of each of the protrusions 24 extends outwardly from the flat portions of the outer surface 20. A number of indentations 26 are formed in the lower surface 22 of the component body 18. By virtue of the forming process (e.g., punching), each of the indentations 26 corresponds in location with each of the protrusions 24. The protrusions 24 may be spaced apart from one another by any distance which provides a desired slip-resistant texture. In an exemplary embodiment, the protrusions 24 (as measured center to center) may be spaced apart from one another by a distance of five (5) millimeters.

Moreover, the protrusions 24 may be arranged in any orientation relative to one another. For example, as shown in FIGS. 1 and 3, the protrusions 24 may be arranged relative to one another in a substantially linear orientation. Alternatively, as 25 shown in FIG. 2, the protrusions 24 of the slip-resistant texture 10 may be arranged in a decorative pattern 32. Such a decorative pattern 32 may take on numerous forms. For example, the decorative pattern 32 may take on the form of a text message 34 such as the

instructional text message "STEP" created by the pattern of the protrusions 24 of the slip-resistant texture 10. Alternatively, the decorative pattern 32 may be an aesthetic pattern which does not include a text message. The decorative pattern 32 may also take the form of a name or logo which is associated with the manufacturer of the aquatic component

5 12. It should also be appreciated that the protrusions 24 of the slip-resistant texture 10 may be arranged in a somewhat random orientation, if desired.

Specific exemplary embodiments of the aquatic components 12, with the slip-resistant texture 10 formed therein, are shown in FIGS. 1-3. In particular, as shown in FIG. 1, the aquatic component 12 may take the form of a pool gutter 50. The pool gutter 50 includes an upper gutter surface 54 and a lower gutter surface 56. The slip-resistant texture 10 is formed in the upper gutter surface 54. Specifically, the protrusions 24 of the slip-resistant texture 10 extend upwardly from the flat portions of the upper gutter surface 54. In such a manner, protection from slippage will be provided to a user walking on, or otherwise contacting, the upper gutter surface 54 of the pool gutter 50.

15 In the exemplary embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2, the aquatic component 12 is embodied as a pool step 60 which is recessed into a wall 62 of a pool. The pool step 60 includes an upper step surface 64 and a lower step surface 66. The slip-resistant texture 10 is formed in the upper step surface 64. In particular, the protrusions 24 extend upwardly from the flat portions of the upper step surface 64. In such a manner, 20 protection from slippage is provided to a user stepping on or otherwise positioning his foot on the pool step 60.

In another exemplary embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the aquatic component 12 is embodied as a drain cover 70. The drain cover 70 includes an upper cover surface 72 and a lower cover surface 76 (see FIG. 4). The slip-resistant texture 10 is formed in the upper cover surface 72. Specifically, the protrusions 24 of the slip-resistant texture 10 extend upwardly from the flat portions of the upper cover surface 72.

As such, a user walking on, or otherwise contacting, the drain cover 70 is afforded protection from slippage by the slip-resistant texture 10.

Referring now to FIG. 4, there is shown a diagrammatic illustration of a work machine 40 which may be utilized to fabricate the aquatic components 12 described herein. In the exemplary embodiment described herein, the work machine 40 is embodied as a punch press machine. As such, the punch press 40 includes a number of work tools such as punches 42. The punches 42 may be operated to form the protrusions 24 in the aquatic components 12. Specifically, when a portion of the component body 18 of the aquatic component 12 is positioned in the punch press 40, the press is operated such that the tips 46 of the punches 42 impact or otherwise contact the inner surface 22 of the component body 18. The impact of the punches 42 against the inner surface 22 causes the formation of the indentations 26, along with the formation of the corresponding protrusions 24 formed in the outer surface 20 of the component body 18.

In regard to the specific exemplary embodiments of FIGS. 1-3, the punch press 40 may be operated to form the slip-resistant texture 10 utilized in the design of the pool gutter 50 (see FIG. 1), the pool step 60 (see FIG. 2), or the drain cover 70 (see FIG. 3). For example, a portion of the pool gutter 50 may be machined with the punch press 40 such that the punches 42 are operated to punch the lower gutter surface 56 thereby forming the protrusions 24 in the upper gutter surface 54. Similarly, a portion of the pool step 60 may also be machined with the punch press 40 such that the punches 42 are operated to punch the lower step surface 66 thereby forming the protrusions in the upper step surface 64. In a similar manner, a portion of the drain cover 70 may be machined by the punch press 40 such that the punches 42 are operated to punch lower cover surface 76 thereby forming the protrusions in the upper cover surface 72.

It should be appreciated that the portion of aquatic component 12 that is positioned in the punch press 40 may be the entirety of the aquatic component 12, or only a portion of the component 12. For example, the entire drain cover 70 may be positioned

in the press 40 during formation of the protrusions 24. In such a manner, the drain cover 70 may otherwise be in final form prior to being punched in the punch press 40.

Alternatively, only a portion of the aquatic component 12 may be positioned in the press 40. For example, in the case of the pool step 60, only a plate 68 (see FIG. 2) may be positioned the press 40. In such a case, the plate 68 may be punched and then subsequently secured to the other plates which form the structure of the step 60. As such, it should be appreciated that the slip-resistant texture 10 may be punched into the aquatic component prior to final fabrication of the component. For example, the protrusions 24 may be punched into the metal body 18 of the pool gutter 50 prior to a bending or other forming operation which bends the body 18 of the pool gutter 50 into the generally U-shaped cross sectional shape shown in FIG. 1.

While the invention has been illustrated and described in detail in the drawings and foregoing description, such an illustration and description is to be considered as exemplary and not restrictive in character, it being understood that only the illustrative embodiments have been shown and described and that all changes and modifications that come within the spirit of the invention are desired to be protected.

There are a plurality of advantages of the present invention arising from the various features of the aquatic components described herein. It will be noted that alternative embodiments of each of the aquatic components of the present invention may not include all of the features described yet still benefit from at least some of the advantages of such features. Those of ordinary skill in the art may readily devise their own implementations of an aquatic component that incorporate one or more of the features of the present invention and fall within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

For example, it should be appreciated that in addition to aquatic components, the concepts disclosed herein have many other useful applications. For example, the concepts described herein may be used in many medical, health, and food

preparation applications. Indeed, the concepts disclosed herein may be used in any application in which stainless steel or other metals, fiberglass, or plastic are used in the construction of a structure which is in need of slip-resistant properties.

2024 RELEASE UNDER E.O. 14176